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SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: Vietnam Requests Avian Influenza (AI) Assistance

¶1. This cable contains an action request. Please see Paragraph 14.

¶2. Summary: The Government of Vietnam (GVN) has requested avian influenza training assistance from HHS/CDC and USDA/APHIS to address laboratory and surveillance issues. The GVN will be working with the World Bank, WHO, FAO, and donor organizations to enhance regional labs and address other aspects, such as re-stocking and farmer compensation, of the avian influenza outbreak. As of early March, the GVN feels the avian influenza outbreak is over. End Summary.

¶3. Embassy Health Attache, Dr. Marie Haring Sweeney (HHS/Hanoi, email: SweeneyMH@state.gov) and Agricultural Attache, Henry Schmick (USDA/FAS, email: Henry.Schmick@usda.gov) had a brief meeting on March 4 with Dr. Bui Quang Anh, the Director of Vietnam's Department of Animal Health, Ministry of Agriculture and Rural Development (MARD/DAH), and Dr. Tran Ngoc Thang (MARD/DAH/International Cooperation Division).

¶4. The GVN officials requested technical assistance from HHS/CDC and USDA/APHIS in conducting avian influenza (AI)-related training courses in two separate areas: (a) lab skills for detecting AI and (b) practical surveillance methods. They would like to hold training courses in both Hanoi and Ho Chi Minh City -- as soon as possible. Dr. Thang will be the key liaison contact, and he will send the Mission a letter with more details on Monday, March 8.

Meeting Notes

¶5. The meeting opened with Dr. Anh thanking HHS for responding to their initial request by sending two CDC lab scientists (Drs. Maines and Tumpey) who came to Hanoi at the start of the AI outbreak to work with DAH's National Center for Veterinary Diagnosis. He noted the CDC assistance had been key in helping their labs learn how to test for AI.

¶6. Dr. Anh said there had been no new AI outbreaks since February 26, all culling had been completed, and he felt the outbreak was over. However, he also observed that AI could return at any time. Given that concern, MARD/DAH felt the most pressing need was to strengthen the capacity of the labs to diagnose AI, and to set-up a robust AI surveillance system.

¶7. At present, Dr. Anh said there were three labs able to test for AI. (Note: We only discussed animal sample testing capacity. End Note.) The labs are MARD/DAH's National Center for Veterinary Diagnosis, MARD's National Institute of Veterinary Research, both in Hanoi, and MARD/DAH's Regional Animal Health Center in Ho Chi Minh City.

¶8. However, to adequately cover the country and carry out all the tests needed to implement a robust countrywide surveillance system, MARD felt that 5 or 6 of the existing provincial animal health labs should be equipped and trained to test for AI. They are targeting the labs in: (1) Can Tho, (2) Da Nang, (3) Vinh, (4) Hai Phong, (5) Hanoi, and perhaps (6) Nha Trang.

¶9. MARD has been discussing this need to enhance these labs with the World Bank and FAO. They noted that roughly \$5 million (of a planned \$20 million World Bank AI project) had been allocated to lab and surveillance issues. (Note: Post will confirm that information with World Bank and FAO representatives. End Note.)

¶10. On the surveillance side, they mentioned needing help to train Provincial officials on practical issues, such as: how to detect AI, how to cull, how to disinfect chicken houses and local markets, how to set-up market-level surveillance systems, and related epidemiological topics.

¶11. In the long run, Dr. Anh indicated that Vietnam would like to set-up AI free zones. They would also welcome technical assistance on that topic, since it relates to establishing surveillance zones and techniques. (Comment: Based on DAH's slow progress in setting up specific pathogen-

free zones or disease-control zones against Foot and Mouth Disease and various swine diseases to boost their pork exports, this is likely to be a major challenge. End Comment.)

12. Coordination: WHO (on the human health side) and FAO (animal health issues) are coordinating donor (World Bank, ADB, and a host of country donor and NGO) assistance efforts with the Vietnamese government. Post will work with WHO and FAO, as well as MARD/DAH, to make sure HHS/CDC and USDA/APHIS activities are similarly coordinated.

13. Comment: The Department of Animal Health has lagged behind other sections of the Ministry of Agriculture in preparing for WTO accession, expanding export markets and embracing international trade. Its Director, Dr. Anh, looked completely exhausted during our conversation with him. AI surveillance will be a challenge given Vietnam's geography: 63 provinces and 3 large incorporated cities along a long coast in a land area the size of Virginia, North and South Carolina, as well as bordering many countries with AI problems. End Comment.

Action Request

14. Mission would appreciate the Department urging HHS and USDA to consider favorably the GVN request for technical training assistance. This is an opportunity to help the people of Vietnam address a humanitarian and economic crisis.

BURGHARDT